



A Source of Whitman's "The Poetry of the Future"

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7 Faner, p. 125.

8 Faner, p. 117.

9 Whitman, *As a Strong Bird*, pp. v-vi.

A SOURCE OF WHITMAN'S "THE POETRY OF THE FUTURE"

In his essay, "The Poetry of the Future," published originally in the *North American Review* for February 1881 (132: 195-210) and reprinted in Floyd Stovall's edition of Walt Whitman, *Prose Works 1892* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 2:474-490, Whitman quotes at some length from what he describes as "a long and prominent editorial . . . on the death of William Cullen Bryant." This editorial, which apparently has not been previously identified, appeared in *The Times* of London for 14 June 1878. It bore no heading and was indeed inspired by the news of Bryant's death, reported in the issue for 13 June 1878; the main subject was not Bryant, however, but rather the relation between English and American poetry.

It is of some interest to note that, in his essay, Whitman refrained from quoting several passages from this editorial which concerned him personally. The first of these passages Whitman has altered to read: "Unless in a certain very slight contingency, the *Times* says: 'American verse, from its earliest to its latest stages, seems an exotic. . .'" (Stovall, lines 187-188). *The Times* editorial actually reads: "Unless Walt Whitman is to be reckoned among the poets, American verse from its earliest to its latest stages seems an exotic. . ."

The second omission is considerably more important. It follows the passage quoted by Whitman (Stovall, lines 201-210) and reads: "Walt Whitman, even without the repulsive eccentricities of his moral tone, must have sunk into obscurity among his countrymen from the want of mannered and borrowed polish which is his special distinction."

It may be that Whitman was a regular reader of *The Times* and noted the editorial as a matter of course. It seems more likely, however, that someone else came across it and called it to Whitman's attention, because of the references to his work. One might almost suspect that Whitman subscribed to a clipping service, for he was remarkably well-informed concerning even casual criticism of his writings. In any event, *The Times* editorial in its entirety should be considered an important source of "The Poetry of the Future," and it may even have been the major stimulus to its composition.

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